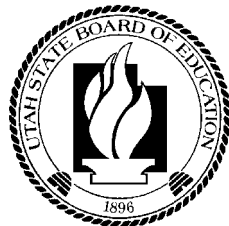


**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**WEST RIDGE ACADEMY  
5500 West Bagley Park Road  
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

**July 16, 2003**



Utah State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**WEST RIDGE ACADEMY  
5500 West Bagley Park Road  
West Jordan, Utah 84088**

**July 16, 2003**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

**Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF  
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

**Patti Harrington, Associate Superintendent**

**Vicky Dahn, Director  
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Georgia Loutensock, Specialist, Accreditation  
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Salt Lake City, Utah**

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## **FOREWORD**

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, July 16, 2003, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of West Ridge Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Greg Johnson is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for West Ridge Academy students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of West Ridge Academy.

Steven O. Laing, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

**UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**250 East 500 South**  
**P.O. Box 144200**  
**Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**District 1**

Teresa L. Theurer  
66 Canterbury Circle  
Logan, UT 84321  
Phone: (435) 753-0740  
[teresatheurer@aol.com](mailto:teresatheurer@aol.com)

**District 2**

Greg W. Haws  
5841 West 4600 South  
Hooper, UT 84315  
Phone: (801) 985-7980  
[gregwhaws@aol.com](mailto:gregwhaws@aol.com)

**District 3**

Edward Dalton  
1323 Bryan Road  
Erda, UT 84074  
Phone: (435) 882-4498  
[edaltan@erda.net](mailto:edaltan@erda.net)

**District 4**

Joyce W. Richards  
930 East 5000 South  
Ogden, UT 84403  
Phone: (801) 479-5370  
[rjwrchrds@aol.com](mailto:rjwrchrds@aol.com)

**District 5**

Kim R. Burningham  
932 Canyon Crest Drive  
Bountiful, UT 84010  
Phone: (801) 292-9261  
[krb84010@aol.com](mailto:krb84010@aol.com)

**District 6**

Tim Beagley  
3084 South 3550 West  
West Valley City, UT 84119  
Phone: (801) 969-6454  
[tbeagley@sisna.com](mailto:tbeagley@sisna.com)

**District 7**

John C. Pingree  
1389 Harvard Avenue  
Salt Lake City, UT 84105  
Phone: (801) 582-5635  
[jpingree@skhart.com](mailto:jpingree@skhart.com)

**District 8**

Janet A. Cannon  
5256 Holladay Blvd.  
Salt Lake City, UT 84117  
Phone: (801) 272-3516  
[jacannon@mstar2.net](mailto:jacannon@mstar2.net)

**District 9**

Denis R. Morrill  
6024 South 2200 West  
Taylorsville, UT 84118  
Phone: (801) 969-2334  
[dmorrill1@attbi.com](mailto:dmorrill1@attbi.com)

**District 10**

Laurel Brown  
5311 South Lucky Clover Ln  
Murray, UT 84123  
Phone: (801) 261-4221  
[dbrown@aros.net](mailto:dbrown@aros.net)

**District 11**

David L. Moss  
1964 Hawk Circle  
Sandy, UT 84092  
Phone: (801) 572-6144  
[tedamoss@msn.com](mailto:tedamoss@msn.com)

**District 12**

Mike Anderson  
455 East 200 North  
Lindon, UT 84042  
Phone: (801) 785-1212  
[mike@mbaconstruction.com](mailto:mike@mbaconstruction.com)

**District 13**

Linnea S. Barney  
1965 South Main Street  
Orem, UT 84058  
Phone: (801) 225-4149  
[ellessbee@attbi.com](mailto:ellessbee@attbi.com)

**District 14**

Dixie Allen  
1065 South 500 West  
Vernal, UT 84078  
Phone: (435) 789-0534  
[dixie.allen@uintah.net](mailto:dixie.allen@uintah.net)

**District 15**

Debra G. Roberts  
Box 1780  
Beaver, UT 84713  
Phone: (435) 438-5843  
[debrar@netutah.com](mailto:debrar@netutah.com)

**Pamela J. Atkinson\***

1123 South 20<sup>th</sup> East  
Salt Lake City, UT 84108  
Phone: (801) 583-2375  
[pa44@msn.com](mailto:pa44@msn.com)

**Steven O. Laing**  
Executive Officer

**Sara V. Sinclair\***

1340 North 1500 East  
Logan, UT 84341-2851  
Phone: (435) 754-0216  
[saras@sunshineterrace.com](mailto:saras@sunshineterrace.com)

**Twila B. Affleck**  
Secretary

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# **WEST RIDGE ACADEMY**

## **Administration**

Greg Johnson ..... Principal/Administrator  
Paul Keene ..... Educational Director  
Davis Ballard ..... Athletic Director  
Rodger Smith ..... Counselor

## **Support Staff**

Michelle Edvik ..... Attendance Secretary  
Wendy Ballard ..... Records Secretary

## **Faculty**

Mat Edvik	Penny Allison
Richard Kemp	Sandra Hirschi
Darren Moody	Colleen Breinholt
Lisa Moeller	Emily Utley
Toni Talbot	

## **Teacher Aides**

Cindy Hadley	Ruth Rhodes
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# **WEST RIDGE ACADEMY REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM**

## **CHAPTER 1.**

### **INTRODUCTION DESCRIBING THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT, THE SELF-IMPROVEMENT PLAN, CHARACTERISTICS ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

A team of three educators (the Visiting Team) visited West Ridge Academy, a *special purpose school* for boys aged nine to eighteen, on July 16, 2003, to complete a site evaluation as part of the requirements for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities (NASCU) and the state of Utah. West Ridge Academy has been accredited since 1990 (candidate membership status, followed by full membership in 1994). The Visiting Team notes that the school has grown from its beginnings in the 1960s, when it had a principal and two licensed teachers, compared to today's staff of principal, educational director, nine licensed teachers, athletic director, guidance counselor, two reading aides, and two administrative assistants. Furthermore, clinical staff members from the Utah Boys Ranch may also provide counseling as needed during the school day.

At an informal breakfast meeting the Visiting Team met with the faculty, some of the social workers and therapists, clinicians, and administrators to discuss various aspects of the work of the school. A succinct overview of the purpose and procedures of West Ridge Academy was presented. Following this meeting the Visiting Team toured the large campus, visited with a cross-section of students, and visited classrooms. The Visiting Team also spoke informally with therapists and various other school personnel.

West Ridge Academy is the educational component of the Utah Boys Ranch. The ranch is located on 77 acres of private property in West Jordan, Utah. The school is described in the self-study as "Christian but non-denominational." The well-maintained facility has several dormitories ("homes") where the students live, expansive lawns and landscaping, educational and administrative buildings, a chapel, and a gymnasium.

West Ridge Academy works closely with the overall program of this residential clinical facility, which is licensed by the Utah State Department of Human Resources to serve a maximum of 128 boys. The number of boys attending the "day program" fluctuates continually. The Utah Boys Ranch program includes clinical and home staff (counselors and married couples who live in each dormitory). The school works closely with these persons as part of the overall therapeutic process, which includes individual (each student works with a "clinician") and group therapy, as well as recreational, music, and play therapy as outlined in each student's Master Treatment Plan. The average stay is nine months to a year, but some boys remain for a longer period of time. As noted above, there is a "Spiritual Living Center" (chapel) on campus. Students are required to take a



religion class as part of the daily schedule.

The largest percentage (75-80%) of students come from Utah. However, students also come from several other states and from foreign countries. Presently, the cultural diversity includes boys who are Hispanic, African-American, Bulgarian, and Asian, as well as Caucasian.

West Ridge Academy is a member of the Utah High School Athletic Association and is classified as a 1A school in Region 17. The school usually competes in basketball, soccer, golf, track, and baseball. The choir has competed in the Solo and Ensemble Festival on both the regional and state levels. Horticulture classes have entered produce in the County and State Fairs and won several awards, including Best of Show.

In preparing for the evaluation visit, the school followed the guidelines of *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* (published by the National Study of School Evaluation—NSSE) and the State of Utah publication, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*. School personnel have attended workshops on Utah's new "collaborating" process. The school also included in its self-study some information concerning the therapeutic side of the overall program.

The school has in place a self-improvement plan that focuses on two primary objectives ("action plans"), which in turn focus on two desired results for student learning (DRSLs): (1) Learning to Learn and (2) Thinking and Reasoning Skills. Each plan includes the following elements: Action Steps, Timeline, Estimated Resources, and Persons Responsible.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONSE TEAM'S PERSPECTIVE AS TO THE WORK OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL IN ADDRESSING EACH ASPECT OF THE SELF-STUDY REPORT**

#### **The School Profile:**

The profile of West Ridge Academy adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational direction. A systematic process of collecting and managing data is in place.

The ongoing profiling of the school accomplishes the following:

- Provides a comprehensive description of the school.
- Includes identification of the school's strengths and limitations, as well as emerging issues.

- Provides a description of the “big picture” of the school’s performance.

Profiling information included the following:

- Some student demographic data. (Note: More information could be included here.)
- Student performance data (national measures, school performance-based measures, and additional performance indicators).
- Stakeholder perspectives on the quality of education.

The above data was further broken down to provide specific information in the following areas:

- Average of 2002-03 grades
- Table of percentage of graduated students
- Post-graduation plans of April and June, 2003 graduates
- Demographic profile of teachers and administrators
- Teacher enrollment and assignments
- Comparison of student/parent/teacher opinions

### **Beliefs and Mission Statement:**

#### *Beliefs*

School beliefs were given in five paragraphs. It is recommended that in future self-studies the beliefs be listed as modeled in the NSSE manual (no more than eight beliefs bulleted or numbered). The beliefs of West Ridge Academy centered on spiritual growth, academic excellence, and character development.

Beliefs include the following:

- Each child is unique and precious to the Lord.
- We are committed to helping our students grow spiritually.
- This curriculum allows students to express individuality, creativity and intellectual curiosity.
- We are committed to the character development of every student, while still allowing the individual to maintain the agency God granted him.

The Visiting Team feels that the belief statements would be more easily understood if they had a common format (i.e., 1, 2, 3) or inclusive terms or expressions (e.g., “all students” or “each child” can grow spiritually, must be allowed to express creativity, must develop his character, etc.).

The Visiting Team recommends that in future self-study reports belief statements be listed and addressed in one section of the report, as outlined by the NSSE publication

### *Focusing on Student Performance.*

It appears that the school beliefs, philosophy, and principles are an outgrowth of many years of profiling, learning, changing, and positive growth.

The beliefs are free of jargon and may be understood by the general public and all stakeholders. They seem to express what the school wants expressed. School personnel are willing to make a commitment to the direction indicated by the beliefs, philosophy, and principles.

### *Mission Statement*

The mission statement is concise and expresses a Christian emphasis on learning. The statement is as follows:

Because the glory of God is intelligence, and our students are children of God, our mission is to bring students to Christ by facilitating optimal learning for all students to enable them to lead fulfilling and productive lives in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society.

The Visiting Team recognizes the mission statement as being meaningful to the school's stakeholders and providing worthwhile, realistic objectives for school personnel in a Christian environment. It describes a compelling Christian purpose and direction for the academic division of the school. The Visiting Team reminds the school that a mission should be clear, concise, and precise, and reflect student learning as a top priority of West Ridge Academy. It should motivate, inspire, and reflect a collective vision that focuses on the role the school must assume in shaping the future. Such a mission statement is based upon and aligned with the school beliefs.

### **Desired Results for Student Learning:**

The School Improvement Team at West Ridge Academy, in collaboration with faculty, administrators, and some parents, has identified the following two desired results for student learning (DRSLs):

- Learning to Learn
- Thinking and Reasoning Skills

For each of the above three DRSLs, concise and meaningful indicators are given for guiding learning and assessment. The Visiting Team observes that West Ridge Academy followed closely the guidelines of the NSSE (*Schoolwide Goals, Survey of Goals*, etc.) for establishing DRSLs.

Members of the Visiting Team concur that the DRSLs are consistent with the school's beliefs, philosophy, and mission statements. The DRSLs reflect meaningful, realistic, yet

challenging overall goals for the students. The Visiting Team reminds the school that the entire self-study should be built around the DRSLs, which form the very heart of the self-study procedure.

### **Analysis of Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness:**

A holistic approach to instruction was evident which indicates integrated values and lifelong learning skills. The Visiting Team observed some cross-curricular instruction, a variety of teaching methods (such as the use of manipulatives), and student involvement, but limited implementation of computers in instruction.

An analysis of the school's instructional and organizational (I and O) effectiveness was conducted according to research-based principles of quality systems of teaching and learning. Each member of the faculty and administration was involved in the review and analysis of the school's I and O effectiveness. Both strengths and limitations were identified. I and O effectiveness was analyzed in accordance with the recommended procedure outlined in the NSSE manual *Indicators of Schools of Quality*.

### **Analysis of the Action Plan:**

The two action plans contained in the school's self-improvement plan (SIP) are aligned with the school's profile, beliefs, mission, DRSLs, and analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness. The areas of emphasis appear to be appropriate for the students at West Ridge Academy. The Visiting Team questions the school's ability to achieve all of the action steps of the two plans within the timeline given (all are planned for June, 2003 to September, 2004). It is recommended that the time for accomplishing all the steps be reconsidered in order to make certain that appropriate and sufficient attention is given to each.

It is commendable that each action plan has a specific goal statement and that each has indicated action steps, timelines, estimated resources, and persons responsible. For example, the goal statement for Learning to Learn is "Students make a commitment to creating quality work and striving for excellence."

## **CHAPTER 3.**

### **THE SCHOOL'S ADHERENCE TO THE NASCU STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION, THE STATE OF UTAH CORE CURRICULUM AND THE UTAH LIFE SKILLS**

West Ridge Academy, with minor deviations, meets the ten standards of the Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities (NASCU). The school also meets the requirements of the State Core Curriculum. However, the *Utah Life Skills*,

while being taught in various departments and with varying degrees of thoroughness, are not clearly articulated in the curriculum. All teachers should become conversant with the seven life skills, and integrate them into the curriculum. The school is also reminded to be ever mindful of Standard VII—Preparation of Personnel. All teachers and school administrators must be properly licensed by the State of Utah, or properly exempted.

## **CHAPTER 4.**

### **GENERAL COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Commendations:**

Commendations include but are not limited to the following:

- There was close adherence to the manuals and surveys of the NSSE in conducting the self-study.
- All school personnel were most frank and willing to improve.
- The Visiting Team thanks school personnel for being cordial and helpful.
- A nurturing, caring, goal-directed atmosphere is evident.
- This special purpose school meets the requirements of the State Core Curriculum.
- The emphasis is on direct teaching—not “packet learning.”
- The facilities and physical plant are excellent and very well-maintained.
- Detailed surveys were administered to constituents.
- The Visiting Team noted that students appreciated the extra help that teachers give.
- Emphasis is given to individual attention for each student.
- Although even more formal follow-up studies could be conducted, the school is commended for the extent to which follow-up has been done, such as the indication on a map of the world of the location of students who are now Latter-day Saint missionaries or serving in the U.S. armed forces. It is also commendable that inquiries are made concerning all students upon their return to a former “home school.”
- The various links with the community fostered by the fourteen-member board of directors are commended.
- There is improvement among virtually all students who have attended West Ridge Academy. Improvement is noted in both grades and character development. Several boys with whom the Visiting Team spoke expressed appreciation for this self-improvement.
- Participation by the boys in “hands-on” activities such as landscaping and some community projects is commended.
- Each student is assigned to a personal clinician, who helps with psychological as well as academic problems.
- The living situation in “homes.” A married couple lives in each of the homes, as

- does a counselor.
- Extra help is offered to students by volunteers.
  - There is opportunity for outdoor programs near Hanna, Utah.

**Recommendations:**

- The school should consider adding to its profile a precise definition of the “average student” at West Ridge Academy (age, male, middle-income, home community, etc.).
- In conducting further ongoing self-studies, even more collaboration should occur so that the preparation of reports is truly an intensive group effort by **all** stakeholders.
- As noted under “Commendations,” more formal follow-up studies should be conducted in order to determine both the short- and long-term effectiveness of the program at West Ridge Academy specifically and at Utah Boys Ranch in general.
- In future self-studies, the names of specific persons responsible for carrying out action steps should be listed, not just the title or position of the one responsible.
- Revisit the timelines of the action steps—currently, all are the same.
- Continue to pursue ways to increase the use of technology (i.e., computers) in classroom instruction and for homework. The Visiting Team recognizes that filters need to be used in order to prevent misuse of computers.